

Revelation 4:1-11 // Approach the Throne

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from Revelation chapter 4 verses 1 to 11 and can be found on page 1, 2, 3, 6 of the Church Bibles. The throne in heaven.

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the Spirit and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of someone, had the appearance of Jasper and Ruby.

A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were 24 other thrones and seated on them were 24 elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumbles and peals of thunder. In front of the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

[1 : 16] In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures. And they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion. The second was like an ox.

The third had a face like a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings.

Day and night they never stopped saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They lay their crowns before the throne and say, You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power. For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Thank you.

[2 : 46] Thank you.

Lord, we come before you this evening and we pray and we ask that we would hear your voice speak to us from this incredible passage.

We pray that its significance, its power would not be lost. That we would see it clearly, we would feel it in our hearts.

We pray that it would feel it in our hearts. We pray that it would feel it in our hearts. We pray that it would feel it in our hearts. We pray that if this is the only moment in this week that we get to think and look at your throne, we pray that you would help us enjoy it, rest in it, and that it would feed us and motivate us for the week to come.

Be with us, we pray. Amen. Well, there are moments in life that capture our deepest emotions, when our hearts are filled with love.

[4 : 22] And I was thinking of an example. I remember when Fern was pregnant and over the nine months I saw her becoming a mother every day.

And at one point she said to me, do you feel like a father? And I said, well, to be honest, not really, no.

She had this intimate connection with our baby girl as she grew inside her. Now, I knew I was a father and I knew our baby was in there, but I didn't really feel like it, you know.

But the very moment Mia was born, as soon as I saw her, when I could actually look at her, instantly I was in tears.

And, you know, I'm not a big crier in life, but I'd gone. That was it. I saw our baby girl and my heart was just filled with this love like I'd never known before.

[5 : 21] And I'm sure we all have our particular version of those moments. Revelation chapter 4 is one of these moments.

This is a passage to capture our deepest emotions, to fill our hearts with love, because of what we see in it.

Because we see what it looks like in heaven, and we look upon the throne of God. Quite simply, this evening, our first point takes us to the throne, to gaze upon the one who sits on his throne.

And then in our second point, we'll think about the appropriate response, which has to be us on our knees in worship. So point one then, on his throne.

I know you guys have been working through Revelation. I've been listening along as well. And so far, John has told us about this incredible vision of Christ that he's had.

[6 : 42] Then in verse 1 of chapter 4, he says, After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.

Can you even imagine? A door standing open in heaven. And then we see that Christ, he actually invites John to come up with him.

He says, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. And at once I was in the Spirit, says John, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

Isn't that incredible? Notice how John doesn't actually name the one seated on the throne. Even as he describes him in verse 3.

And the one who sat there. Why is that, do you think? Why wouldn't he give us his name? Well, I think it's because chapter 4 is about standing in awe.

[8 : 01] It's about beholding. You know the song? Behold our God seated on his throne. Chapter 4 is setting the scene, a scene of beauty, of majesty, of glory and victory, with the throne at center stage.

Next week, in chapter 5, John will move on to the details and the drama of what's happening on the throne. But in chapter 4, we just simply behold him.

Him who is seated on his throne. We're being moved to a deeper sense of love and worship. Just like the living creatures of verse 8, who are always gathered around the throne.

Look at how the throne moves them to worship. Day and night, they never stop saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Day and night, day and night, they never stop worshipping before the throne. I know you guys have been through chapters 1 to 3, so you'll know that Christ has given this spiritual diagnosis, if you like, of the health of the church.

[9 : 33] And to be honest, they're struggling. They're a long way off. Day and night, never-ending worship of God. But as I was preparing this sermon, what I'd never noticed before about these letters, at the end of each one, Christ calls the church, Christians like us, who struggle in worship at times, to be victorious.

Just look to chapter 3, verse 21, just before our passage. Christ says, To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious, and sat down with my Father on his throne.

The word victory actually comes from the word Nike, just like the sports brand. In Greek mythology, Nike was the goddess of victory.

So obviously, great name for a sports brand. No one wants to be associated with losing. I wonder, though, if you've ever been made to feel like a loser for being a Christian.

Revelation is here to remind you that you're definitely not. Christ calls us to victory, because he is Christus Victor, Christ the victorious, divine king, who triumphs over all evil, has everlasting dominion over his everlasting kingdom.

[11 : 19] Once I saw this repeated call to victory in the first three chapters, for me, chapter 4 just came alive.

Christ repeatedly calls us to victory, but doesn't it always beg the question, how? Is that actually possible?

Chapter 4 says, Yes, Yes, Yes, because he is seated on his throne. Yes, because we live our lives before the throne of victory.

John's description through this passage, obviously, it's intense, it's dense, it feels complicated, but it's all about victory.

not just victory in general, but the victory, the power and majesty of God who has placed his king on his throne.

[12 : 22] That's why he gives us these details that are dripping in Old Testament imagery and symbolism. In verse 3, the one who sits on his throne, he has this appearance of jasper and ruby.

In other translations, it sort of emphasized that these are gemstones, jasper and ruby gemstones. There's this rainbow that shines around the throne.

Verse 4, there are 24 elders dressed in white, dressed in white with crowns of gold. We ask, are the gemstones part of the Old Testament priest's chest plate?

Or are they there just because they're incredibly beautiful? The emerald rainbow, is it to do with Noah and the sign of grace?

Or is it just incredibly beautiful? Paul Chan has the impossible task of describing the indescribable here.

[13 : 40] We can find all sorts of ways of connecting this to the Old Testament, but that's because the Old Testament is pointing forward to one thing, the victory of God's king for his church.

Now, the first readers of this letter, they lived in a time when victory looked like the Roman Empire who absolutely dominated the world.

But how small and insignificant the Roman Empire seems against the real and true throne of victory? Notice verse 5.

You can almost imagine being blinded and deafened from this thunder and lightning that is coming from the throne. And what about verse 6?

This sea of crystal, if you like, in front of the throne. The sea in the Bible, it's usually a symbol of chaos or evil, but here it seems like it's frozen like ice, it's calm, it's solid, it's controlled.

[15 : 02] Sometimes I quite like to think of when my life looks like absolute chaos, everything seems in disarray.

And you just think of that comparison of this calm, solid, frozen sea before the throne, and this contrast, this reminder that yes, my life is in chaos, but there he is on his throne, in control.

And then following that we have these creatures that are described that they're like an ox, like a man and an eagle.

And perhaps, yes, perhaps they represent all created beings. There's lots to say and there's so many books to read about John's description. But I want to point out tonight, notice how throughout it all, John always keeps the throne central.

Everything is in relation to the throne. Every piece of description is about helping us to picture the beauty and the majesty of this scene, the scene of God's throne.

[16 : 29] If we're honest, all Christians, we have times where we struggle to feel the power and the majesty of God, right?

we struggle to sense God's presence in our lives when he feels far from us during the week. There are times when we come to church, we smile, we sing, but our hearts aren't really in it.

We believe in him, we believe he's there, we pray to him, we're thankful for his mercy, but our passion feels missing sometimes.

It's like the busyness, the distractions, the hardships, the tiredness, the challenges of family or perhaps it's relationships or loneliness.

Sometimes they seem to extinguish the flame of our love and our worship. what do you do in those moments?

[17 : 43] Usually, I think when we want to refocus ourselves to God, to draw near to him and especially at church on Sunday, we tend to think look to the cross, look to the cross of Christ.

Revelation points us to the throne. We live our lives and we worship this very evening before him who's on his throne.

And remember how the throne is described in Hebrews. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We're saved because of the cross but we live our lives before the throne of victory and by God's grace we also draw strength from it.

For our second point, our final point, we're going to think more about that response to the throne.

And if we've been captured by the significance of the throne, our response has to be like the elders

of verse 10.

[19 : 18] Look down with me. The 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They lay their crowns before the throne and say, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being. God's love. If our non-Christian friends or family were around our house, around our home and they happened to walk past the study and they caught a glimpse of us praying on our knees and praying this prayer, saying these things to God, what would they think?

What would they think about that? Perhaps they would just find it surprising. I think more likely they'd find it quite strange.

Maybe they'd even think it looks quite weak and desperate even. And yet in the Old Testament this picture of praying down on knees, we get this with King Solomon.

[20 : 56] King Solomon. And he's not just down on his knees, he actually stretches out his arms as he prays before the face of his God.

It's easy to dismiss the significance of physical prayer. prayer. And there's a right reason for doing it sometimes.

It doesn't necessarily mean that if someone prays with their hands together that it's real. But we don't want to just completely dismiss it as unimportant.

What if our posture sometimes expresses the passion in our hearts? So, you know, I sometimes find my physical posture looks very defeated when I pray because sometimes it reveals my heart feels quite defeated by the world around me.

All the time. I think it's worth considering sometimes. For the first readers of this letter, who may very well have been called to worship Caesar like a God, it would have been so hard to stay strong, to keep on drawing near to the one true God, to keep believing and trusting in the full power and victory of Christ on his throne.

[22 : 34] And like these first readers, as we look around at the world today, we see so many people who claim for what belongs to the throne.

They claim authority, they claim power, they claim our allegiance. And that can get us down. But our resistance, our battle for victory, it's not one that is extravagant, it's not one that is dramatic, it's not with the sword, it's not with violence, but very simply, it's taking this posture of what looks like weakness.

Quite simply, we get down on our knees and we remember we live our lives before the throne of God.

this may look weak to some people, our choices and our clothes may look weak, if you like.

[23 : 46] Maybe our church building looks weak, we have to make decisions about employees and whether or not we keep the church roof repaired.

perhaps we're judged for our lack of material possessions or perhaps our ethics. Perhaps all these things make us appear weak in the eyes of the world and yet we know that we share in this ultimate victory of God.

God. If we can hold that in our minds, in our hearts, that's what's going to really drive our response, our worship and our love of God.

God. When I was a trainee at St. Silas, someone, another minister, he took me and a few others from Cornhill to a worship service in a community centre in Glasgow.

It was a fairly rough area. I'd have only gone there with this particular Glaswegian minister. The building was very basic. As we entered, we all had to pick up our chair from the side and set it out.

[25 : 13] We joined this little circle, about 12 of us, let's say. Someone passed around these really old pieces of paper and they had the song lyrics on them.

People around the circle would shout out, I'd like to sing this song, I'd like to sing that one. None of us really could sing, we didn't have any instruments, but we sang and we praised God.

Then the minister who brought us gave a 10 minute talk on Luke's gospel and then we prayed. Now the majority of people at this church were struggling with addiction, right?

so when we were asked for prayer points, this woman gets up and she says, please thank the Lord for helping me stay sober for 24 hours.

And I remember thinking, wow, that's so humbling. You know, are my prayers motivated by such dependence on God, thanking him for the strength to survive 24 hours without alcohol?

[26 : 39] Are my prayers so desiring his grace? Are they so shaped by a desire to draw strength from his victory, his power, from his throne of victory?

everything about that, that worship service that night, looked so weak in the eyes of the world. And yet, it was one of the most powerful, intensely real and authentic and memorable times of worship I have ever had to this day.

How is that possible? that old building with no resources whatsoever. Because in Christ we have access to the throne, we live, we worship before the throne.

His throne, his victory, which is at the front and center of our worship. worship, whatever the situation, the circumstances, whatever we see with our eyes and our lives, if we remember not only the cross, but also the throne, our worship is fueled and energized by victory.

The throne is what drives the victorious Christian life. love. Listen to this from a Dutch reformed minister in the 17th century.

[28 : 30] It is not sufficient to reflect only upon Christ's humiliation, seeing and beholding in his humiliation the atonement.

To reflect only on these matters is the cause of much deadness, unbelief, and instability.

However, the consideration of Christ's humiliation in conjunction with his exaltation in glory on his throne will yield much growth, comfort, and strength.

That is the beginning of heaven, where the beholding of Christ in his glory will be the eternal joy and occupation of the elect.

Isn't that deeply, deeply challenging? It almost sounds like heresy. To reflect only on his suffering would lead to deadness, unbelief, and instability.

[29 : 48] But actually, when we join it with his exaltation, his glory, his victory, where he is now, it will yield much growth, comfort, and strength.

And I love that phrase, that is the beginning of heaven. Isn't that what Revelation is doing for us?

It's, yes, we're looking to the future, but a future that starts right now.

It's not that we worship the cross now, and then one day we'll start to think about the throne. From the very first day we give our lives to Christ, our worship is shaped by the cross and the throne.

We persevere through cross-shaped suffering, but we do so victoriously because of our throne-centered worship.

Cross-shaped suffering, throne-centered worship. From the moment we entrust him with the care of our soul, we begin to worship the Christ who reigns in glory on his throne.

[31 : 11] The first day we turn to Christ is the first day of an eternity in worship of our everlasting king, his everlasting kingdom, and his everlasting dominion.

this is what God made us for, so let's enjoy it, let's enjoy him, let's pray. Let's just take a moment to be still before God, take a moment to think about the throne and receive it as a gift, take a moment to think of his victory and what that means for our lives.

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.

Father, we pray before you this evening, before your throne, your throne of grace, your throne of victory.

glory and we place before you our whole lives, all our pain, our suffering, our joys, we put it all before you this evening and we worship you.

[33 : 04] We worship your holiness holiness. and we pray that as we encounter you this evening, you would grow us and sustain us and shape our minds, open our eyes to see you truly in your victory.

victory. be with us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.